

Last Minute Memorandum

April 7, 2003

To: State Board of Education Members



From: Marion Joseph
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Subject: Item 9, April 2003 Agenda
Reading First Program – Criteria for Selection of Independent
External Evaluator

According to California's Reading First Plan (as approved by the United States Department of Education on August 23, 2002), the State Board of Education needs to approve the specifications for the work of the external independent evaluator (as noted in Exhibit XIII, Agency Responsibilities). Staff from the California Department of Education (CDE) have met on several occasions with State Board staff and members of the advisory panel that is assisting with Reading First implementation. Through these meetings, various evaluation questions have been developed that will serve as key specifications in the Request for Proposals (RFP). We believe these questions reflect – both technically and in spirit – the requirements of federal law and the provisions of the state's plan. We recommend that the State Board approve these questions (see attachment) to become the guiding specifications around which the RFP will be constructed. Responsiveness of potential contractors regarding how these questions will be addressed will then become key criteria upon which proposals will be assessed.

The State Board's approval of the evaluation questions will permit the CDE staff to complete and issue the RFP. The CDE's subsequent roles will include assisting the State Board in the selection, administration, and monitoring of the external independent evaluator over a three-year period, beginning in 2003.

The State Board will need to award the contract for the external evaluation (which is budgeted at \$400,000 per year) at its June meeting. The contractor will be responsible for producing the 2002-03 (year 1) program evaluation, as well as (by September) some parts of the state report on student achievement, in order for the State Board to approve the report and deliver it to the United States Secretary of Education by October 2003.

ATTACHMENT

Proposed Reading First Program Evaluation Questions

Program Implementation

1. How well did participating districts and schools implement their Reading First Grants in accordance with California's Reading First Plan as approved by the United States Department of Education?

Specifically, what characteristics, key district/school program elements, and adherence to assurances distinguish full implementation of scientific, research-based reading programs from incomplete implementation?

2. What resources, support, and professional development activities are district-level administrative staff, schoolsite administrators, and classroom teachers receiving in implementing the Reading First grants? (Resources and support activities include, but are not limited to, funding, release time, adequate amount of appropriate instructional materials, additional staff, grade-level meetings, additional training, use of assessment data, and use of technology.)

Related questions include the following:

- a. How are the district-level administrative staff and schoolsite administrators creating structures supportive of professional development activities?
- b. How do the Reading First professional development activities crossover into classroom instructional practices and into overarching Reading First program goals and objectives?
- c. What sustained opportunities do teachers and site administrators have for collaboration with peers and for exploration of different solutions to problems being experienced in reading instruction both in the classroom and at the school level?
- d. What are the participants' perceptions of Reading First professional development activities in comparison to other professional development activities they have experienced?
- e. To what extent have district-level administrative staff, schoolsite administrators, and classroom teachers participated in the technical assistance training presented by the Regional Technical Assistance Centers (R-TAC) and the California Technical Assistance Center (C-TAC)? How do schoolsite administrators and classroom teachers implement and integrate R-TAC/C-TAC technical assistance in the Reading First instructional program at participating schools?

Program Impact/Outcome

3. What is the impact of the Reading First Program on K-3 students in participating schools?

Related questions include the following:

- a. What progress are the districts and schools making to increase the numbers of K-3 students (specifically including significant subgroups of students) whose reading achievement is at or above grade level? What progress are the districts and schools making to decrease the numbers of K-3 students (specifically including significant subgroups of students) whose reading achievement is below grade level? In partially addressing these questions:
 - 1) What progress are the districts and schools making to increase the number and percentage of students in grades 2 and 3 who are reading at or above grade level based on the STAR data, by year, by cohort, and by funding cycle?
 - 2) Which districts and schools are making the largest gains in reading achievement for students in grades 2 and 3 based on STAR data?
 - 3) What progress are the districts and schools making to increase the percentage of students in grades K-3 who meet the criteria on the recommended list of assessments for California's Reading First LEAs?
 - b. What program factors (both at the district level and at the school level) contribute to greater and lesser increases (perhaps even decreases) in reading achievement (as defined by the numbers of students reading at or above grade level)?
 - c. What are the characteristics of districts and schools that have experienced greater and lesser increases (or decreases) in reading achievement (as defined by the numbers of students reading at or above grade level)?
4. What evidence is there that the Reading First Program has improved the effectiveness¹ of participating districts and schools?

Related questions include the following:

- a. Do particular processes or activities in the implementation of the Reading First Program correlate to higher levels of program effectiveness?

¹ Effectiveness refers to operational changes in such areas as district and school organization, governance, staff attitudes and expectations, and curriculum content and instructional practices.

- b. In what ways (e.g., roles, attitudes, and/or specific actions) do key LEA officials (e.g., district superintendent, local school board, curriculum and instruction administrators, coordinators, and schoolsite administrators) and classroom teachers enhance or hinder the implementation and effectiveness of the Reading First Program?
- 5. Have any unintended consequences² resulted from the implementation of the Reading First Program?

² Unintended consequences include both the positive and negative impact of the implementation of the Reading First Program not encompassed by program objectives or planned outcomes.